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Observance of the International Day for the Right to the Truth concerning Gross Human Rights Violations and for the Dignity of Victims

Report of the Secretary-General

Addendum

Summary

The present addendum to the report of the Secretary-General on the Observance of the International Day for the Right to the Truth concerning Gross Human Rights Violations and for the Dignity of Victims includes information provided by Argentina and Guatemala regarding activities carried out and events organized in their respective countries in connection with the commemoration of the International Day.

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I. Introduction

1. The present addendum to the report of the Secretary-General on the observance of the International Day for the Right to the Truth concerning Gross Human Rights Violations and for the Dignity of Victims (A/66/335), is submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution 65/196. It includes information received from Argentina and Guatemala in response to the note verbale sent to Member States requesting them to provide relevant information on any activities carried out and events organized in connection with the commemoration of the International Day for the Right to the Truth concerning Gross Human Rights Violations and for the Dignity of Victims. This information therefore supplements similar information received from other Member States, organizations of the United Nations system, and other international organizations and civil society entities, which is outlined in the report.

II. Commemorations held in connection with the International Day in Argentina

2. In its response, Argentina noted that, in addition to 24 March being the International Day, in 2002, 24 March was declared the National Day of Remembrance for Truth and Justice, as a reminder of the coup d'état that took place in Argentina in 1976. Every year events are held across Argentina in commemoration of the National Day.

3. On 24 March 2011, the Argentine Ministry of Foreign Relations held a commemoration at Palacio San Martín, in Buenos Aires, which was attended by the National Secretariat for Human Rights, Nobel Peace Prize laureate Adolfo Pérez Esquivel, the mothers of the Plazo de Mayo, members of the diplomatic corps, students of the foreign service, and representatives of the Argentine human rights community. During the commemoration, a video was presented demonstrating the connection between previously existing clandestine centres of detention and torture, especially the former Navy School of Mechanics (Escuela de Mecánica de la Armada), and those who ran the Ministry of Foreign Relations during the dictatorship. Accounts of former detainees and disappeared persons were also presented, including those describing the transfer of victims from the former Navy School of Mechanics to the Ministry, and their use by the Directorate of News and Public Information as forced labour. The Minister of Foreign Relations invited the youth and future diplomats to learn about and participate in the process of justice and truth, stating that "the truth teaches us, unites us".

4. A commemoration was also held on the grounds of the former Navy School of Mechanics, where different youth organizations planted 1,000 flowers with the message, "Do not forget me" in a space dedicated to remembrance and the promotion and protection of human rights. Members of civil society organizations, persons who had been detained and disappeared, and the Mothers of the Plazo de Mayo participated.

5. Also on 24 March, the National Secretariat of Human Rights issued a press release, which discussed the coup d'état and its effect on Argentinian society. It noted that the human rights movement, headed by the grandmothers and mothers of the Plazo de Mayo, embodied the fight for memory, truth and justice, which led to

the fall of the dictatorship and put pressure on subsequent civil governments to address the issue of impunity. Now, those who are responsible for crimes against humanity are being tried and sentenced throughout the country, and further initiatives continue to be developed.

6. The National Secretariat for Human Rights also inaugurated the first working day of the Dr. Fernando Ulloa Centre for Assistance to Victims of Human Rights Violations (Centro de Asistencia a Víctimas de Violaciones de Derechos Humanos Dr. Fernando Ulloa) with a workshop on assistance as a form of reparation for victims of human rights violations. The objective of the workshop was to discuss the role of the State in the protection of human rights, and the effects of State practices on victims and society as a whole. The Secretary for Human Rights noted that the Centre seeks to provide reflection regarding 30 years of advances in relevant medical and other related fields, where that knowledge is not well known or easily accessible. He stated that the Centre represented a huge leap forward and acknowledged the uniqueness of the Centre internationally.

7. Furthermore, a large march to and demonstration in Plaza de Mayo were held, as is traditionally done on the National Day, which were attended by members of civil society organizations, members of the public, and government officials.

8. In the city of Mendoza, the Directorate of Human Rights for Mendoza Province launched a special 24 March edition of a booklet on training and human rights for high school teachers. In addition, the National Secretariat for Human Rights inaugurated a temporary centre for human rights in the city, where a range of activities were undertaken between 24 and 26 March. The activities included audio-visual exhibitions; panels on the situation of cases addressing the commission of crimes against humanity in Argentina and Mendoza, women's rights in Argentina, cultural heritage, memory and human rights, public policy and human rights at the local level, indigenous peoples and human rights, rights to identity and children, and human rights organizations in Argentina; and, a presentation by the Argentina Forensic Anthropology Team (Equipo Argentino de Antropología Forense) on the organization's use of forensic science in the investigation of human rights violations at national and international levels. Photography exhibitions were prepared by the National Archive for Memory.

9. In its response, Argentina also outlined the various activities that were carried out in the provinces of Argentina in commemoration of the National Day. These included a wide range of social, cultural and sporting events, such as cultural acts, music, theatre, cinema, the installation in Mar del Plata of a commemorative stone in memory of disappeared persons, a 10-kilometre run, a bicycle ride, and photography exhibitions.

III. Commemorations held in connection with the International Day in Guatemala

10. In its response, Guatemala stated that activities and events were organized in relation to the International Day to underscore both the day itself and the right to the truth as one of the primary, indispensable conditions for the effective consolidation of the peace process and strengthening the rule of law in the country.

11. It noted that the Peace Secretariat widely distributed the web page of the International Day and the Secretary-General's message contained therein. Furthermore, it recalled that the Government declared 2011 the Year of the Institutionalization of the Recovery of Historical Memory. In this context, the Peace Secretariat, the Presidential Commission on Human Rights, and the national reparations programme issued a joint declaration, according special importance from the perspective of access to truth and justice to documentation generated through the Truth Commission for Historical Clarification, the Recovery of Historical Memory project in Guatemala and the reparations programme. The declaration noted the value of efforts by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and victim groups in bringing cases seeking truth, justice and reparations. Furthermore, it stated that it was necessary to generate the conditions for the institutionalization of historical memory, noting that the Government has made tremendous efforts in this regard, and progress can be seen, particularly in relation to cases brought by victims and survivors of the armed conflict in Guatemala. The success of these legal proceedings has been due to, among other factors, the rediscovery of historic documents, particularly those in the Peace Archives and in the Historical Archive of the National Police. It further noted the decision by the Government to make public the military archives, which was implemented on 20 June 2011.

12. In addition, in its response, Guatemala provided further information regarding initiatives to guarantee the right to the truth in Guatemala. In particular, it noted the creation and activities of the Peace Archives, which is tasked with, among other things, recovering the historical memory about events from 1954 to 1996. The establishment and responsibilities of the Commission on the Declassification of Military Archives 1954-1996, the Historical Archive of the National Police, and the Presidential Commission to Coordinate Executive Policy in Human Rights were also described. The Commission has declassified over 12,000 documents, representing 99.3 per cent of all the known official information from that period. The Historical Archive of the National Police contains about 80 million documents with information about human rights violations that were committed during the internal armed conflict. In 2009, this information was made available to the Ministry of the Interior and the International Commission against Impunity in Guatemala for use in investigations into crimes against humanity that occurred during the armed conflict. On 7 June 2011, as part of the commemoration of the International Day of Freedom of Expression, the Historical Archive of the National Police published a report entitled "From Silence to Memory: Revelations of the National Archive of the National Police". The Presidential Commission to Coordinate Executive Policy in Human Rights has a mandate to follow up on petitions and cases of human rights violations in the Inter-American and United Nations systems. It also supports initiatives for the strengthening of the justice system, such as the law of the National Commission to Search for Victims of Forced Disappearances and other Forms of Disappearance.

13. Guatemala also noted in its response that, in September 2010, the Ministry of the Interior issued regulations governing the prosecution of human rights, and that efforts and agreements have been made by various ministries, institutions and organizations to better coordinate and strengthen investigations into human rights violations. Finally, information was provided regarding exhumations and the search for disappeared persons.